**Human Sacrifice & Value: The Limits of Sacred Violence**

**Introduction**

Human sacrifice has emerged and re-emerged throughout history and across cultures, indicating that it is something fundamental to human beings, but *why?* At its most basic, the act of sacrifice is an exchange of one thing for another – an offering with an intended purpose. But, sacrifice is also an act of substitution and consecration in which the sacrifice itself takes on previously unattributed sacred value, enabling it to become transcendentally value-laden. In so-called ‘sacred’ acts of human sacrifice, the life of a human being is taken as a surrogate for the sacrificer through a substitution logic that situates violence at the very brink of the sacred. But, can such an act ever really be anything more than profane violence (i.e. murder) once it has actually taken place? The focus of this research project is to uncover the deeper social mechanisms at work, transcending the enigmatic boundary and conventional dichotomies between sacred and profane forms of violence built into human sacrifice. The project will unravel the limits of sacred violence and explore the value transformations behind this overly theorized yet under-operationalized phenomenon that has fundamental real-world ramifications today.

Human sacrificial tropes are frequently used to legitimate violence, or to make accusations against violent actions that are deemed to be ethically offensive. Such approaches are, however, problematic since they explain violence by situating it within a ‘sacred vs. profane’ dichotomy, with little attention given to the correlation, even historical co-dependence, between the two. The point of departure for this project is that sacred human sacrifice cannot be understood in isolation or on any essentialist terms, as it has largely been to date. Only by exploring its slippery, ever-changing boundaries with adjacent acts of secular violence, such as combat soldiering, public execution, suicide-bombings and homicide, can the value of human sacrifice be fully comprehended. Conversely, secular forms of violence could be better understood by outlining their possible historical connections to the values of sacred forms of human sacrifice.

The project seeks to untangle the ambiguities between sacred and profane violence by placing the question of value at the very center of analysis of human sacrifice. What is the relative value of ritually taking an *actual* human life? To address this, the project approaches the question of value in two ways. The first concerns what values are at play in human sacrifices, whether these be economic, ideological or emotional – and explores how they have been created, substituted or subverted in varied historical contexts. The aim is to understand what kinds of values serve as ends in these types of sacrifices, and how they transform over time. The second addresses value in relation to questions of the commensurability, or lack thereof, between different sacrificial practices. The project develops an innovative and rigorous methodology for cross-cultural comparisons, combining both humanistic and natural sciences approaches to analyzing the values attributed to human sacrifices, their possible comparability across both time and place, and any possible common patterns of value transition. Thereby, the project will be able to develop a profound understanding of the value systems involved in sacrificial violence, how these value systems are transformed, and how and why sacred human sacrifice may slip into profane violence in the contemporary world. Furthermore, it will allow us to operationalize knowledge for a better understanding of the nature of sacrificial violence as such, not only amongst scholars, but also policy-makers and the public at large, who are regularly confronted with the largely enigmatic yet real consequences of human sacrificial violence.

**Relevance to the Call**

This project incorporates Norwegian and international scholars at the forefront of innovative research in the humanities and social sciences. It will be based at the Museum of Cultural History, UiO, Oslo. The project poses
bold questions about a puzzling yet extremely pervasive subject – the value of human sacrifice – which it seeks to understand from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Ignorance of the processes, whereby sacrificial values slide into destructive forms of violence, continues to bewilder observers and policymakers in the world today. The project advances a pioneering methodological framework, combining cultural phylogenetic modeling with a Dumontian cross-cultural comparative method to compare and contrast asymmetric sacrificial traditions and their associated values. The project leader, Prof. Rane Willerslev (Prof. II, UiO), has a recognized track record of successfully bridging the gaps between archaeological, anthropological and historical studies in groundbreaking, creative ways. The research team is comprised of senior and junior scholars, all demonstrating excellence in their respective fields, including early research positions. Ultimately, the project will have broad theoretical, but also practical, applications to the understanding how sanctified violence generates different values under different circumstances.

**Background & Status of Knowledge**

Everywhere, we find both explicit and implicit sacrificial logics, aimed at different goals, making the term ‘human sacrifice’ appear something of a floating signifier. Anthropologists have even argued that human sacrifice is nothing but a mythical Western construct, something exclusively ascribed to ‘others’ as a way of demonizing them. However, human sacrifice has a well-attested reality and the term or its local equivalent is frequently used by various groups, even in today’s societies. Most studies of secular violence have ignored the theme of sacrifice altogether. Political science and sociological theories of secular violence have emphasized group dynamics, social identity, status, or marginality and alienation. Psychological approaches (based on limited Western value systems) have largely focused on individual cognition alone. In fact, scholarly research on violence has for the last two decades focused primarily on radicalization, but this too can be critiqued for a lack of historically-grounded analysis, and for leaving out a concern for the possible crucial role of sacrificial tropes. Conversely, there is a parallel danger in reductionist explanations that understand sacrifice as a sanctified religious act only. We submit that it is actually human sacrifice’s confusing mutability – its liability to change, that allows it to commute between sacred and profane acts of violence so easily – which is in need of deeper historical investigation, if we are to move forward in understanding the presence of sacrificial violence in the contemporary world.

Theories of human sacrifice have projected a number of values on to it. It has been proposed as a form of economic exchange, an assertion of social power, a channeling of inherent human violence through a chosen ‘scapegoat’, and even as an ideological salve for guilt over violent human inclinations. Temporal aspects of these theories range from human sacrifice echoing a mythical origin point that must be endlessly re-enacted to maintain a universal order, to human sacrifice situated within a cultural-evolutionary trajectory, e.g. originating in the Paleolithic hunt. Although these efforts attempt to explain dynamic historical developments, they are in reality merely static functionalist models set up to explain the reproduction of society. However, the phenomenon of human sacrifice defies explanation by way of these conventional approaches to understanding value, and cannot be essentialized by any number of a priori assumptions about the human condition. There is often no direct evidence for economic, social or even sacral benefits of human sacrifice that can be accounted for. In fact, in some cases, people do not even know to whom the sacrifice is being offered, or what it is for.

Another problem is that most theories of sacrifice rely on a purely symbolic reading to understand its value. At the heart of the symbolic approach to sacrifice is the notion of the surrogate victim, who represents both the sacrificer and the divine. According to symbolist theory, it is this use of a surrogate that sets the sacrifice apart from (and makes it sacred in relation to) other (and profane) acts of killing. Thus,
when animals, plants, and even inanimate objects, such as effigies are ‘killed’ they echo human sacrifice by symbolic proxy. However, on the empirical level it is actually impossible to find any cases of purely ‘sacred’, well-functioning human sacrifices. We suggest that this is because human sacrifices always flirt with various forms of profane violence. This holds true whether considering descriptions from the Old Testament to archaeological data on Iron Age bog bodies, to Aztec ritual mass-killings, right up to present-day cases of martyrdom. That the profane is embedded within the sacred is therefore not accidental – it is the rule rather than the exception. Thus, human sacrifice, it appears, will inevitably slip into homicide, suicide, or even genocide. In point of fact, recognition of the slippery boundary between the sacred and the profane is lacking entirely in the many theories on sacrifice and in today’s attempts to explain contemporary manifestations of human sacrifices, such as in cases of extremist sectarian violence like suicide-bombings and broadcasted executions through various media channels. Further, symbolist models overall provide no rationale for differentiating between human and nonhuman sacrificial victims, nor do they account for the temporality built into the dynamics of substitution. If, in theory, everything and anything can act as symbolic substitutes for the original, why then do numerous narratives about human sacrifice point to the unique value and ultimate necessity of eventually taking a human life? Paradoxically, it is the politically-motivated profane act of violence that is at the forefront of analyses in modern radicalization and extremist intervention literature, yet these completely ignore the obvious connections to sacrifice-related killings.

Approaches, Hypotheses and Choice of Method

Approach and hypotheses: This project’s aim is not to unveil a singular ‘essence’, ‘function’ or ‘meaning’ of human sacrifice, but to investigate the enormous diversity of competing values generated by any one form of sacrifice. This schema takes into account that ‘shadow values’ accompany dominant ones, and under hitherto unexplored circumstances, can upset the value system at play. We know little about the actual mechanisms behind the highly creative, temporally-based substitution of values within different sacrificial traditions and even less about how they emerge, transform, and even collapse under changing conditions. For instance, under what circumstances is the sacrifice of a human life actually necessary, and conversely, when and how can a hitherto worthless object (such as paper money or even a stone) stand-in for and even become more value-laden or important than a human life? These transformations in sacrificial value have simply not been explained by conventional theory, but are of paramount importance if we are to understand what is ‘the value of human sacrifice’.

To do this, the project tests two related hypotheses. (1) The practice of human sacrifice is intrinsically connected with an inevitable competition between values, both sacred and profane. (2) When an associated value system is overturned, this leads human sacrifice to slip between sacred and profane forms of violence. This slippage can occur subtly over time or as the result of more immediate and dramatic historical contingencies. We test if this has to do with the point at which substitution logics reach their limits, causing sacred values to be subverted, and allowing the very act of sacrifice to slide into simply profane violence. Conversely, we test how and when value shifts could allow secular and profane forms of violence (e.g. murder, execution, suicide) to become sanctified.

Methodology: a research agenda is undertaken in which both qualitative and quantitative methodologies work in concert throughout the duration of the project. This establishes transdisciplinary analytics for on-going use in hypothesis testing and feedback. Research teams develop case studies drawing on their specific areas of knowledge (see below), but data collection, collation, analysis and assessment will be undertaken synergistically across disciplines. A key benefit of the outputs will be to identify historically-contingent circumstances where cultural values have shifted, and where normally sacred values involving human sacrifices have descended into profane acts of killing and vice versa. Overall, the research is undertaken in five stages, as follows:
1. **Determine units of analysis.** Specialized scholarly input will develop and maintain a rigorous approach to cross-cultural comparisons based on strategically-selected, relevant units of analysis. This will be based on best practices from studies in archaeology, social anthropology and ethnology, and history. Data will be systematically collected from extant ethnographic literature, archaeological records and archives. This preparation is necessary for the quantitative analysis of macro-scale, historically-contingent genealogies that map human sacrificial traditions across cultures.

2. **Phylogeny.** Understanding the shifts in values associated with human sacrifice in different cultural contexts cannot be observed through direct synchronic observation, but necessitate a deep historical approach. Quantitative statistical approaches to understanding cultural transmission over many generations will reveal changes in patterns of human sacrificial traditions over the long term. When applied to cultural data, tree-building phylogenetics adapted from evolutionary biology will be used to generate hypothetical genealogies of human sacrificial traditions that will enable us to identify historical branching-off points, or crossroads, in the shifting of values and practices. Phylogenetic trees contour relationships between groups based on descent with modification, as opposed to simple patterns of cultural similarities. These relationships are tracked by following the direction of innovations between cultural lineages. The branching patterns in the trees generated by these methods will identify key junctures in history and map where values were overturned, with justifications for sacrifice changing radically. As focal points, these findings will then lead to qualitative investigations to explain changes that may or may not be understood from the conventional historical or archaeological record. For example, we will identify points in the history of one sacrificial tradition (e.g. bog bodies or religious martyrdom, see work package descriptions below) where shifts in values or particular changes in the mode of sacrifice appear to have diverged from earlier forms. We then look for the same pattern in trees that represent entirely different traditions (e.g. Viking Age thrall sacrifices, revolutionary executions, or economic sacrifices in medieval Christendom). Where congruent patterns emerge, we then engage in a comprehensive review of the existing knowledge relating to each specific case (see step 3 below) and apply a Dumontian cross-cultural comparative approach (see step 4) to draw insights into the historical contexts at play.

3. **Qualitative investigations.** Based on emerging statistical patterns, a systematic hermeneutic exegesis (e.g. exhaustive critical literature review, in-depth source material data-mining, etc.) of the values involved in human sacrifice, across the world and from specific phases of human history where the data available is rich enough, is brought to bear on the careful assessment of new findings generated: through surviving texts, the revisited archaeological record, and the ethnographic literature.

4. **Cross-cultural comparisons.** Louis Dumont’s method of comparing different values of ‘analogous magnitude’, whereby fair comparisons are made between disparate groups, will be applied in order to juxtapose all the possible combinations of values that emerge in studied human sacrificial traditions. Here the Dumontian approach can be applied to the comparison of different trees based on cultural lineages: are there common, paradigmatic patterns that occur, enabling us to infer from known upheavals other ones that are not accounted for in the written record? This framework suggests that cross-cultural comparisons are indeed possible, but they must be sought between elements that have a similar amount of valorized weight within the societies under observation. Once these transitions are identified they will be used as focal points for understanding how shadow values can differ profoundly from dominant ones even within the same culture – indeed, we hypothesize that finds will suggest that they are often diametrically opposed in some way.

5. **Interpretations and synergy.** At this stage, further, better-informed hypotheses about other cultural circumstances can be exposed and explored. These involve the assessment of new traits identified during Dumontian cross-cultural comparisons, e.g.: the shifting dynamics between dominant and shadow values, and
the implications of these for much larger social phenomena (e.g. the transition from the belief in spirits to belief in gods, or the transition from the belief in a deity to materialism or nationalism).

This process enables hypotheses to be formed on the basis of any given case study (see below) which can then be tested rigorously in another, through respective quantitative and qualitative methodologies used in a highly complementary fashion. Critical path for the research is to identify the presence of dominant and potential shadow values associated with human sacrificial traditions across test-cases, in time and space. This can be started through the phylogenetic analyses which establish genealogies, but will ultimately be achieved primarily through the systematic exegesis of texts from throughout history, supplemented by a return to archaeological data and ethnographic research.

**Project Plan, Management, Organization and Cooperation**

*The PI:* Rane Willerslev (Prof. II, Museum of Cultural History at UiO) has worked on human sacrifice across myriad cultures, with a focus on societies in northeast Siberia, based on extensive fieldwork and wide-based ethnographic and literary studies. He is highly qualified to lead the interpretive and empirical analytical integration of the proposed project based on his extensive track record of developing innovative cross-cultural comparative methodologies and working across-disciplines in anthropology, archaeology, and history of religion. He will use his insights from prior studies for making a large-scale theoretical synthesis in the transdisciplinary study of human sacrifice in human history and today.

*The team:* is comprised of researchers from different disciplines: anthropology, archaeology, numismatics, and history of religion and will be based at the Museum of Cultural History at UiO, Norway. The project brings together strategically-selected disciplinary and regional expertise with an integrated mission to capture the complex value dynamics of human sacrifice. Members of the research team are already integrated into interdisciplinary networks focused on studies of religiosity, violence and values, and their constant re-emergence in the contemporary world. This provides an excellent basis for longitudinal studies and will allow the team members to efficiently carry out their individual sub-projects on a transdisciplinary level.

**Figure 1. Tripartite structure of research themes and workpackages.**

*Work packages:* the work packages are organized around the tripartite structure of human sacrifice itself: the Victim, the Sacrificer, and the Recipient (Figure 1). Each has a particular focus on the specific boundaries between sacred and profane forms of violence within this tripartite structure. Each is designed around case studies chosen to offer the greatest temporal and geographic range, manifested both in sacrificial practices and
possible associated values. This range, stressing cultural diversity rather than similarities, provides the most appropriate starting point for the five-point research methodology described above.

Work package 1: Understanding the Sacrificer: Leader: Mette-Louise Johansen; Researcher: Sean O’Neill; Visiting Scholars: Caroline Humphrey, Jan Dietrich; Themes: Biblical Executions; Secular Revolutions (France and Russia), and Contemporary Martyrdom.

Contemporary anthropological research, combined with the historical record, can provide valuable insights into the aims and motivations of sacrificers. This work package explores human sacrificial tropes and value transformations in an historical context from ancient historical and Biblical literary sources, through early Christianity, up to present day forms of extremist religious martyrdom. Here, we investigate the tipping point of value transformation between dominant values and their shadows, including the blurred intersection of sacrificial violence and profane political violence. What conditions actually lead to the inversion of values? Empirical test cases will provide specific contextual answers, with a focus on understanding the intentions of the sacrificers, and their often unintended consequences.

The first test case will provide an in-depth investigation into the dynamics of shifting values between sacred sacrifice and profane execution in several examples from the Old Testament, with an emphasis on systematic, text-based exegesis. Here there are a number of narratives expressing clear contradictions between sacred and profane logics, as when Abraham seemingly goes to sacrifice his son Isaac from the point of view of an unconditional faith, when his gesture actually functions to test God’s commitment to humanity, with Abraham knowing full well he will gain worldly power, whether he kills Isaac or not, and that Isaac’s ongoing existence is not really threatened either way.

The second test case study covers the curious inversions of values highlighted by mass executions in the aftermath of the French and Russian revolutions, respectively. Both movements attempted state-organized deicide, but each led paradoxically to a renewed sense of sacred values and regenerated a belief in God amongst the populace. It explores the unintended consequences of human deicide, specifically investigating the processes of value transformations that have occurred in eye-witnessed historical cases where secular-political movements have attempted to do away with God but have, in effect, resulted in a resurgence of religiosity. Qualitative and quantitative data will be provided from historical texts, and synthesized within the frameworks of the project.

The third test case focuses on the value transitions of present-day Islamist fundamentalists and what they may purport to be sacrificial violence, i.e. suicide-bombing, combat soldiering and social media-based performance of executions. This case examines value transformations involved in radicalization and de-radicalization, by investigating how the initial urge to sacred self-sacrifice slips into forms of profane, even homicidal, violence. Overall, we investigate the conditions under which, in each case, the dominant values of the sacrificers appear to have been completely overturned, often by diametrically-opposed shadow values, underlining the constant slippage between the two. Better understanding these processes of value inversion will help explain otherwise inexplicable, seemingly senseless, acts of violence. Primary data is provided through fieldwork and the timely synthesis of other near-contemporary published and unpublished research findings.

Work package 2: Explaining the Victim: Leader: Mette Løvschal; Post-doc: TBD; Visiting Scholars: Anders Klostergaard Petersen, Caroline Dodds Pennock; Themes: Bog bodies and war-booty sacrifices, Aztec ritual mass-killings, Viking Age sacrifice.
The archaeological and ancient historical records provide many examples of human sacrifice, particularly with evidence relating directly to its victims. This work package focuses on three test cases primarily from the archaeological record, each highlighting the victim’s role in specific human sacrificial contexts.

The first case explores the extensive evidence of human sacrifice from the conditions of death and deposition of so-called ‘bog bodies’ of the Early Iron Age in Scandinavia and Northern Europe (500 B.C.-750 A.D.). It covers the transition from human sacrificial killing to that of highly ritualized warfare practices with the mass destruction and deposition of war booty, including the ritual ‘killing’ of swords, shields and horses, as well as offerings of wooden effigies, which presumably took the place of human victims towards the end of this period. Research is undertaken through a thorough systematic re-examination of the existing literature on bog bodies in conjunction with re-assessment of associated material collections in collaboration with Moesgaard Museum and Museum Silkeborg in Denmark.

The second test case focuses on the widely documented practice of human sacrifice among the Aztecs of Mesoamerica. It studies the broad range of victims, the intricacies of their means of selection, and the complex liturgies involved in the value-attribute of different victims. Aztec religious dogma demanded victims from every class of society, from slaves to nobility, from every age group and gender category; even victims taken through warfare were drawn intimately into the social and cosmological order, and then transformed literally into gods-on-earth before their deaths. The test case examines the means by which the identities of victims were transformed in order to modify their value as sacrificial currency. Data is generated from contemporary accounts, the considerable existing interpretive literature on Aztec human sacrifices and the archaeological record.

The third test case explores the rich documentary and archaeological record of Viking Age ‘thrall’ and ship-related sacrifices. One such example was described by Ibn Fadlan in 921 A.D., bearing witness to a ship-cremation ceremony in which the sacred act of sacrifice accompanying a royal burial appears to slip not only into ritualized suicide, but of spectacularized rape and execution, verging on the homicidal. Data is generated from existing literature, the archaeological record and museum collections, in collaboration with The Viking Ship Museum at UiO.

Each of these cases tests the boundaries between the willingness of the victim, their perceived intimacy with their sacrificers, and the fore-fronted necessity or value of the sacrifice itself. The work package will develop unique knowledge relating to the selection of sacrificial victims, the diversity of identities they take on, and it will expose the interplay between the implicit and explicit value transformations that simultaneously necessitate and result from the victim’s death.

Work package 3: Appraising the Recipient: Leader: Svein Gullbekk; Post-doc: TBD; Visiting Scholars: Anders Klostergaard Petersen, Jan Ketil Arnulf; Themes: Christian salvation economy, Commodification of sacrificial economies in Europe; Economics of sacrifice in modernity.

This work package focuses on the recipient of the sacrifice, whether it be a deity or an ideology – whatever or whomever the act of sacrifice is aimed at. The research undertakes three test cases that highlight the recipient’s role in human sacrifice and how it is transformed in economic terms, here referred to as the ‘Economy of Salvation’. In the Christian tradition, the Economy of Salvation was the translation of Christ’s sacrifice into spiritual and material value. This came to represent monetary terminology in obligations such as pilgrimages, tithes and church-building, participation in Crusades, through to church reform, the introduction of Purgatory and trade in Papal indulgences, all the way down to the smallest individual symbolic transactions – all of which were ultimately seen as echoing the value of Christ’s sacrifice.
From the first century A.D. to the early 18th century, the sacrifice of Christ is the most important sacrifice in the Western tradition. Thus, the Church itself is founded on the ultimate act of human sacrifice. The first test case looks at how, by conceptually transforming the execution of Jesus into a divine sacrifice, the church instigated a shift in values from profane violence to sacred economy; indeed in many ways the value of economic transactions came to define what it meant to be a good Christian. In this way, the Church translated human sacrifice into spiritual and material value: monetary and personal sacrifice became payment for the promise of eternity in heaven and even became currency through which salvation could be purchased. What kinds of value transformations made this process possible – one in which symbolically, the very body and blood of the sacrificed Christ could enter into a monetary exchange throughout Western Christendom, from Antioch to Greenland?

Test case two is related to test case one, and focuses particularly on how the Economy of Salvation was operationalized and commoditized. The empirical evidence is collated from extensive collections of individual offerings materialized in archaeological records from churches, cathedrals and monasteries from 11th century A.D. to the post-Reformation era, drawn from previous research carried out in the project ‘Religion and Money: Economy of Salvation in the Medieval Ages’ (NFR FRIPRO 143821; P.I. S.H. Gullbekk; case test one also utilizes this data).

Test case three addresses who benefits from human sacrificial tropes in non-sacred terms in modern day society, from contemporary altruistic sacrifices such as surrogate mothering, organ donation and even economically-motivated suicides? Human sacrifice in the modern era no longer necessitates an actual act of killing – the body can be offered without the literal end of the life of the victim or even the intention of the sacrificer (e.g. surgical organ removal). Thus, modernity has made bodily human sacrifices possible in ways that they have never previously been. This is because the recipient has changed; the range of recipients has become larger; and such sacrifices can be made between not only intimate relations but also between individuals outside the personal sphere and at a global scale. We examine how modernity and fundamental changes in the concept of the recipient have created a market demand for sacrificial exchange.

**Collaboration Plan:** the five-point methodology model will form the basis of interdisciplinary collaboration at different scales: a) the individual research, b) work package teams, c) across the three work packages together under an advisory board, and ultimately d) for continued feedback vis-à-vis outside stakeholder groups. This involves individuals within each work package meeting fortnightly to report finds, set strategy and discuss progress along the five-point model. On a monthly basis, work package teams meet, with work presented, discussed and evolved by the team at large in an open and collaborative mode. The PI will track progress and synthesize results in an ongoing fashion. On a quarterly annual basis, the research is presented and discussed in a day-long workshop to members of the advisory board, comprised of four senior experts, all of whom are also actively participating within work packages themselves.

**Advisory Board:** will be comprised of distinguished international scholars: Jan Ketil Arnulf (BI Norwegian Business School, NO), Dame Caroline Humphrey (University of Cambridge, UK), Caroline Dodds Pennock (University of Sheffield, UK), Anders Klostergaard Petersen (Aarhus University, DK), and Jan Dietrich (Aarhus University, DK). Each member of the Advisory Board will contribute one month each as a visiting scholar in Oslo over the first two years of the project.

**Dissemination Plan:** In order to further the public understanding access to the project’s research, we will undertake a major human sacrifice-themed exhibition at the Museum of Culture and History in Oslo, in collaboration with its curators. Members of the project will actively engage in the ongoing debates about the nature of human sacrifice and, when relevant, in collaboration with policy-makers. These outreach activities will
not only enhance the project’s public profile, but also give upcoming scholars training in engaging the public through various digital platforms. Junior researchers will be encouraged to apply for young researcher grants in Norway and abroad. Further, the project will function as a research platform for policy-making partnerships and for informing security services. By setting the highest standards of academic excellence in making original contributions to knowledge-building, assembling the best team of scholars around a strong core group, and with an ambitious outreach plan, the project aims to become the pre-eminent authority on the value of human sacrifice and its relationship to profane forms of violence, globally. The research field will be expanded through Toppforsk and ERC applications, incorporating further case studies applying insights gained through the current project.

**Communication with users:** Several related policy-making research institutions and security agencies across Europe are targeted as first-year clients for the project. There are already established collaborations between project researcher Mette-Louise Johansen and Fafo Institute in Oslo, the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, the Danish Institute Against Torture, and the Danish Institute for International Studies. Furthermore, with the East Jutland Police Force, Crime Prevention Section, Aarhus, Denmark, the project will continue an already established collaboration between the Department of Anthropology, AU, and a) the police in the district of east-Jutland (the Aarhus Police), b) the public social services and c) the public child- and youth sector in the municipality of Aarhus (together, these three departments run the so-called ‘Aarhus Model’, which is considered to be among the most successful anti-radicalization programs in the world). The project will also link up with Styrelsen for International Rekruttering og Integration (SIRI), hereunder ‘Det nationale center for forebyggelse af ekstremisme’. This center is responsible for the development of the Danish national counter-radicalization strategy, cross-municipal action plans and policy-making; it works closely with the political administration on security and integration issues. At the international level, the project links up with RAN (the European Radicalization Awareness Network) and Strong Cities Network (the latter is driven by an International Steering Committee of 25 cities and municipalities from different regions across the globe). Partnering will be facilitated programmatically by the hosting of quarterly research seminars, guest visits and conferences, and the dissemination of white papers and specific focused relevant case studies.

Moreover, practitioners working in the anti-radicalization sector will benefit greatly from this research project since they will get a deeper insight into the concrete values of human sacrifice as well as how these values may shift, reverse, take new forms or be substituted by something else.

**Ethical Perspectives:** All researchers on the project embrace the ethical perspectives as set out in the *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and Theology* (4th Ed.), published by the National Committee for Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH)⁹⁹. In all of our work on other cultures, we strive for a deep and empathetic knowledge of local traditions, respect for traditional knowledge and social matters, and we do not use classifications or designations that allow unreasonable generalization. This code also applies to historical research where time has passed since the events in question; we avoid devaluing in any way people from past cultures and historical periods. Furthermore, we maintain a constant respect for private interests, public administrative and governmental institutions, and vulnerable or marginalized social groups.

**Gender Issues:** The project’s research team is comprised of expert scholars in their respective disciplines. Participants were selected for their relevant knowledge on the subject of human sacrifice and value in their related fields and the potential value of their contributions to the project agenda. Incidentally, the gender composition of the research team is relatively well-balanced, gender-wise (roughly 2/3). Moving forward, the team will continue to maintain an inclusive atmosphere and fair balance regarding the composition of relevant scholars, in terms of gender, age and academic experience.